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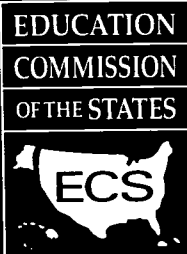
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ABSTRACT

Transforming postsecondary education to meet the demands and challenges of a new century is a task of enormous scope and complexity that will require strong, imaginative, and sustained leadership at state and institutional levels. Policy leadership will need to identify the needs of society and postsecondary education and articulate a vision based on a data-driven analytic framework. A public agenda to address the identified problems must be supported by a convincing storyline. It will be essential to build a consensus around the need to realize this vision while staying "on message" and maintaining the focus of transformation efforts. It will also be necessary to align the implementation tools for transformation through planning, structure and governance, regulation, budgeting, and accountability provisions. Little real progress is likely to result unless the tools and approaches of policy leadership are able to establish and maintain the new directions community, state, and national needs require. (SLD)



Transforming Postsecondary Education for the 21st Century:

The Nuts and Bolts of Policy Leadership

What's Inside

Looking for leadership

Essence of policy leadership

Barriers to policy leadership

Content of public agendas

Getting started

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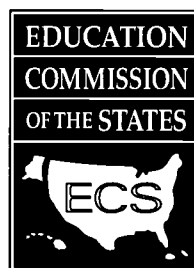
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Transforming Postsecondary Education for the 21st Century: The Nuts and Bolts of Policy Leadership



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transforming postsecondary education to meet the demands and challenges of a new century is a task of enormous scope and complexity, and will require strong, imaginative and sustained leadership at both the state and institutional levels.

Policymakers and education leaders must rethink the role postsecondary education plays in relation to economic and social needs and then carefully reexamine policies, structures and operating principles in light of this new vision. They must help diverse constituencies recognize changing needs for postsecondary education, build support and consensus to address these needs, and align existing policies or develop new approaches to ensure that these needs will be effectively addressed in the future.

Specifically, policy leadership for postsecondary education consists of systematic attention to the following tasks:

Identifying the Needs and Articulating a Vision

- Build a data-driven, analytic framework
- Frame a public agenda to address the identified problems
- Create a convincing storyline.

Building Consensus Around the Need To Realize This Vision

- With institutional leaders
- With business leaders
- With the public.

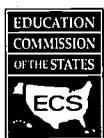
Staying “On Message” and Maintaining the Focus

- Use every opportunity to call attention to the issue
- Ensure progress is monitored and reported.

Aligning the Implementation Tools

- Planning
- Structure/governance
- Regulation
- Budget
- Accountability.

At the core, policy leadership is grounded more strongly in the art of public leadership than in the techniques of policy analysis and implementation. Policy leadership involves creating consensus around an agenda, not “finding” that agenda. It requires individual leaders and leadership groups to get out in front of an issue — to identify key problems, develop and articulate a vision for dealing effectively with the problems and continuously build and broaden understanding, commitment and support for that vision. Little real progress or social benefit is likely to result from the unfolding transformation of postsecondary education unless the tools and approaches of policy leadership are able to establish and maintain the new directions that our community, state and national needs will require.



PAUL E. PATTON
GOVERNOR OF KENTUCKY
1998-99 ECS CHAIRMAN

Several years ago, we began an intensive effort in Kentucky to reexamine our higher education needs and put into place a broader, more accessible, more effective postsecondary education system. In spring 1998, I began working with ECS to put together a national initiative, *Transforming Postsecondary Education in the 21st Century*, involving many states, individuals and partnering organizations. What we have learned in Kentucky and are beginning to see nationally is that this is really all about transforming ourselves — our expectations for advanced education and training, our ways of using and providing it and, most important, our ways of leading it.

In the years ahead, states and communities face stiff competition — competition for industries and jobs, competition that presumes high levels of basic education and skills, competition based on focused research and exceptional expertise, and competition for the resources to invest wisely in our collective future.

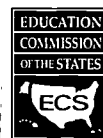
Behind these things, the real competition is for knowledge — how to acquire it, how to use it, how to keep up with its continuous growth. We all know that to compete economically in a world shaped by continuous advances in knowledge, we need the full participation of all sectors of education and, in particular, the effective use of all postsecondary education resources. We look to postsecondary education to enhance the well-being of individuals and all of society in a multitude of other ways as well — from more secure families, to healthier communities, to more vibrant arts and scholarship, to creating a more promising future.

Fortunately, competition based on knowledge and these other values is not what economists call a zero-sum dilemma; our knowledge gains are not automatically someone else's loss, and making our lives and communities better can help others as well. I continue to believe that in postsecondary education we can achieve something like the quantum leaps in physics — quantum expansion in access to advanced knowledge and skills, quantum gains from how we integrate learning and knowledge from a variety of sources, and quantum improvements in how we apply new knowledge to meet the needs of individuals and society.

To accomplish quantum changes we need new forms of leadership. In particular, we need to reexamine our existing framework of higher education policies to take down the barriers and provide the direction to allow us to realize our full potential. This report examines and provides useful guidance for that type of leadership, which we are calling policy leadership. I and the other individuals and organizations that have worked on this initiative have come to see policy leadership as key to the transformation of postsecondary education that we seek for the future. This report is not for reading alone — it is for doing.

I would like to extend my thanks to the many experienced and dedicated individuals and organizations who worked with us during the course of this important and timely initiative.

Paul E. Patton



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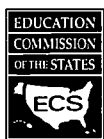
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INTRODUCTION

Complex and interrelated forces are driving change in America's postsecondary education system: demographic trends, shifts in the economy and the job market, technological developments, ongoing reform and innovation in elementary and secondary education, the increasing proliferation of new providers of higher education services.

Taken together, these developments and trends set the stage for a profound and wide-ranging transformation of the nation's postsecondary education system.

But how ready, willing and able are our postsecondary institutions to undertake reform? To what extent do traditional ways of governing, regulating and funding higher education impede innovation and improvement? And what can and should public leaders do to help guide, promote and sustain the process of transformation?

Under the leadership of its 1998-99 chairman, Kentucky Governor Paul E. Patton, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) has focused its efforts over the past year on helping state leaders develop a clearer understanding of the transformation that postsecondary education is undergoing, and on strengthening their ability to guide and facilitate this process.

As a starting point, ECS in 1998 conducted an in-depth survey of governors, legislative leaders and state higher education officials. By an overwhelming majority, the governors who participated

in the survey rated the quality and performance of postsecondary education as increasingly crucial to their states' continued strength, vitality and livability. At the same time, a large majority of the governors viewed traditional institutions of higher education as troublingly out of sync with changing needs and demands, and acknowledged the need for major changes in policy and practice to create more a responsive postsecondary system. Most significant, all but a handful of the governors expressed reluctance to take on such an agenda.

To be sure, rethinking and redesigning postsecondary education is a challenge of enormous scope and complexity, and will require strong, imaginative and sustained leadership at both the state and institutional levels. To grasp the enormity of this challenge, one has only to sketch a rough outline of what a truly transformed postsecondary education system might look like.

Picture, if you will, a postsecondary system that serves as a flexible infrastructure for meeting diverse needs in a time of rapid change. This system would be versatile, accessible, attuned to new technologies and economic trends; capable of continuously redesigning itself around the needs of both traditional and nontraditional students; able to try out new things, take initiative and use resources wisely.

In such a system, all segments of higher education — community colleges, univer-

Sweeping changes in institutional practices will not — and indeed cannot — occur without a major overhaul of the public policies that shape postsecondary education.

sities, research institutions, technical training schools — would be focused on working together to stay abreast of changing needs and market demand.

Traditional boundaries would give way to new alliances among various segments of the postsecondary system and a stronger sense of partnership with K-12 education.

The transformed system would be dynamic, entrepreneurial and accountable. In contrast to today's highly regulated and centrally managed system, individual institutions would have greater flexibility to define and achieve their missions, with incentives to grow into new markets with new services. Institutions would offer learning programs in a variety of settings and formats: traditional undergraduate and graduate classes, full-time and part-time attendance, on campus and off campus, synchronous and asynchronous, traditional degrees as well as new competency-based programs.

But such sweeping changes in institutional practices will not — and indeed cannot — occur without a major overhaul of the public policies that shape postsecondary education. State leaders must rethink the role higher education plays in relation to economic and social needs and then carefully reexamine policies, structures and operating principles in light of this new vision.

Policymakers must face the fact that state mandates, regulations and funding formulas stand as major impediments to reshaping and improving postsecondary education. They provide little incentive

for institutions to work together on issues of mutual concern: improvement of lower-division instruction, purposeful growth and expansion of technology-based education programs. In many ways, they place significant constraints on institutions' ability to cut costs, develop new programs, collaborate with one another and experiment with new ways of doing things.

The higher education policy structure that has been in place for decades is a state-based system of governance of public colleges and universities, complemented by free-standing private colleges and universities chartered by the states. The state operates this sector as a cartel, establishing the institutions' roles and funds, and regulating and protecting them.

Today, this cartel management is changing under the assault of the forces mentioned above. Technology and "virtual" courses are changing how learning takes place. New institutions, as well as the entrepreneurial response of existing institutions, are moving higher education from a system of state-based cartels to at least a partial open market. More and more institutions are crossing state, and even national, boundaries. But the current system of governance is not prepared to create and manage a market, and most institutions are not prepared for the new competition.

For-profit firms have been active in higher education for a long time. They, however, have been confined to the margins — contractors for food services or bookstores, or

institutions such as barbers' colleges or truck drivers' schools. Today, these providers are penetrating to the core of the academic process, offering degrees that compete with traditional universities and colleges or helping traditional institutions design courses — or even major degree programs — for the Internet.

Demographic shifts, technology, the emergence of new providers — each of these forces is not only powerful in its own right, but also interactive with the others. For example, new providers tend to be more entrepreneurial and, therefore, more aggressive in their use of technology. New providers are not limited geographically, so that competition from them has begun to cause traditional universities and colleges to adopt technology more rapidly and look at ways to provide education from a distance.

Given these changes, states must develop entirely new modes of providing for higher education. A preliminary review of state policies indicates that almost all are built on the assumption of the cartel system and do not serve to create and manage an intelligent, responsive market for higher education. Clearly, policymakers will have to learn to deal with issues that run beyond state, or even national, boundaries. They must find ways to take advantage of the best effects of competitive forces while limiting the disadvantages and preserving the best aspects and traditions of the current higher education system. In short, the task is to create a third way — better than the

current system of regulation, but without the flaws of a true market system.

Colleges and universities are just awakening to the dangers inherent in this new world, and a growing number have begun to recognize and react to the opportunities it presents. But the shared governance of the campus, the powerful hold of tradition and the strong student demand for entrance make it hard for institutions to begin to plan seriously for their futures.

Thoughtful planning for a different future requires a joint effort on the part of political and academic leaders. Colleges and universities need to be part of an ongoing debate about what is happening and what needs to happen to make higher education more responsive to today's needs.

This report is addressed to state and higher education leaders, who play crucial roles with respect to the postsecondary education system. It argues for policy leadership that will help states and the public recognize changing needs for postsecondary education, build support and a consensus to address these needs, and align existing policies or develop new approaches to ensure that these needs will be effectively addressed in the future.

[Policymakers] must find ways to take advantage of the best effects of competitive forces while . . . preserving the best aspects and traditions of the current higher education system.



LOOKING FOR LEADERSHIP

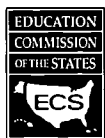
Policymakers are increasingly aware of the pressures on higher education from a set of external forces that cannot — and should not — be ignored. While these forces differ in their specifics from state to state, their presence is so ubiquitous and their potential impacts so large that few policymakers think they should be overlooked. Yet, across the states it is not easy to find examples of decisive state action to address the impending challenges.

Almost all states will have to deal with the realities of a radically changed postsecondary client base. In some states, waves of new students will impact colleges and universities not only by dint of sheer number but also because of growing diversity. Other states are threatened with exactly the opposite problem — a decreasing number of new high school graduates — resulting in higher education capacity that exceeds demand but which cannot be abandoned because of local interests and regional politics. And virtually all states are confronted with the need to serve increasing numbers of place-bound adults.

This scenario means states must provide an array of postsecondary education options in geographically dispersed locations in ways that respond to the specific programmatic requirements and time constraints of working people. Few if any states have been able to develop and implement effective strategies to meet these diverse and rapidly changing adult education needs.

The changing client base of postsecondary education extends beyond individuals to encompass employers and state governments as well. Both have come to understand the importance of a well-educated, well-prepared populace as fundamental to improving quality of life and enhancing economic competitiveness. This recognition has led to higher expectations for institutions of higher education. The 1998 ECS survey undertaken as background for this report indicates that governors expect colleges and universities to provide education and training that is highly responsive to the short-term needs of employers and communities. The notion of just-in-time delivery, it appears, is being applied to higher education in much the same way as to other service providers.

Policymakers and the policy environment itself also are being affected by the sweeping impacts of technology and the emergence of new providers, including for-profit institutions such as the University of Phoenix and a growing list of others. These new providers can serve as either formidable competitors or powerful allies in meeting new postsecondary needs. Change and expansion of new postsecondary markets are so rapid and so fundamental that good practices have not been established and conventional wisdom cannot be used as a basis for decisionmaking. New rules are being made up as these markets emerge.



This dynamic environment calls for strong, imaginative leadership by higher education policymakers at both the state and institutional levels. But while circumstances cry out for a new kind of leadership, there is a widespread sense that it is in short supply. At a time when the need is for substantially new ways of ensuring that the benefits of postsecondary education are available to all citizens, the practice is to make slight adjustments to old ways of doing business. When the requirement is for reengineering and redesign, the common practice is to tinker under the hood. In short, when the opportunities for new policy leadership emerge, the tendency is to revert to modification of the existing tools — governance, funding mechanisms, accountability and regulation.

But the landscape is not entirely barren. It is possible to identify examples of leadership that are substantially changing the ways in which postsecondary education institutions are meeting new needs and interacting with their social and economic environments. For example:

- As Governor of **Georgia** from 1992 to 1998, Zell Miller systematically used an array of policy mechanisms to address that state's low postsecondary education participation and attainment levels. He used funding to strengthen institutions, HOPE Scholarships to encourage individuals seeking further education, technology to improve teaching and learning, and P-16 councils to bring educators and communities together.
- In **Illinois**, Governor Jim Edgar during his two terms strongly supported the Board of Higher Education's Priorities, Quality, Productivity initiative, which used a combination of approaches to reexamine state-level priorities and reshape institutional roles in meeting these priorities. Now, under Governor George Ryan and new board leadership, this has evolved into a new Citizen's Agenda for Illinois Higher Education.
- In **Kentucky**, Governor Paul E. Patton's leadership is fostering sweeping changes in postsecondary education policies to address the needs of a poorly prepared workforce and the conditions associated with low per-capita income. A full arsenal of policy tools has been brought to bear on the problem — new postsecondary structures, energized leadership, investment funding and additional ways to monitor progress.
- In the Western states, leadership by Governors Michael Leavitt of **Utah** and Roy Romer of **Colorado** fostered the creation and subsequent development of the Western Governors University as a vehicle for broadening access, sharing resources across state lines and promoting options for entirely new ways of delivering instruction and credentialing learning — innovations that will bring change to many existing state policies.

When the opportunities for new leadership emerge, the tendency is to revert to modification of the existing tools.



- In **Oklahoma**, the framework of "responsibility centers" developed and now being implemented by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education promises to meet the diverse needs of individuals, employers and communities by more effectively using existing education assets. Academic, funding, telecommunications and other policies are being shaped to support the new institutional roles required by this new framework.
- In **South Dakota**, the Board of Regents and its executive director have built legislative and executive branch consensus around an agenda for change in the services provided to the state and the ways in which those services are delivered.

These and other examples illustrate the existence and importance of policy leadership. But there are major impediments to fostering such change. Two impediments in particular are critical. First, the idea of policy leadership is abstract; it is difficult to describe its critical features in concrete terms. As a consequence, policy leadership is employed by those leaders who understand it intuitively, but not by those to whom it represents an approach outside their experience. This leads directly to the second problem — an inability to provide guidance on how to exercise policy leadership. If it cannot be described in concrete terms, we cannot provide suggestions on the steps required for its widespread use.

THE ESSENCE OF POLICY LEADERSHIP

In the simplest of terms, policy leadership for postsecondary education is the art of helping citizens (and their representatives) identify the needs to be met, the problems to be solved and the policies to support these objectives. In slightly more detail, postsecondary education policy leadership is composed of systematic attention to the following four tasks:

Identify Needs and Articulate a Vision

In many ways, policy leadership does start with “the vision thing,” but not in the customary forms. Too often, the search is for catchy rhetorical phrases without substantive attention to the tangible needs and problems that must be addressed. It is easy, for example, to promote the concepts of higher education access and opportunity; it is more difficult to focus attention on the particular education needs of certain subpopulations within the state, be they residents of rural areas or inner cities, immigrant populations or citizens of limited financial means. It is less difficult politically to tout the importance of higher education for economic development than it is to acknowledge that the greatest need within the state is basic literacy education for an underprepared workforce.

The task is to articulate a vision for and about the citizens of the state, not about the higher education enterprise. The challenge is to identify the conditions of individual and corporate citizens of a state that must be changed for the benefit of those citizens and for the good of society as a whole.

Kentucky's 2020 Vision

Few states demonstrate sustained policy leadership for education more clearly than Kentucky. During the 1990s, Kentucky moved from widely acclaimed elementary and secondary education reforms to comprehensive postsecondary restructuring and improvement. Fundamental changes in state policy by the legislature, strong leadership by the governor, and support from Kentucky's community and business leaders have been key to this success.

In higher education, the stronger, reconstituted Council on Postsecondary Education is defining the vision, building the consensus and putting in place the tools to meet Kentucky's education goals and aspirations for the 21st century. The 2020 Vision pictures a future society of:

- Highly educated citizens who are self-sufficient workers and good parents
- Competitive industries and vibrant communities
- Scholars and practitioners with new ideas and relevant knowledge
- An integrated system of education that meets public needs and, more important, supports individual and community aspirations.

The 2020 Vision reflects a “clear call for change” that is enhancing collaboration, increasing investments and producing new energy across Kentucky's postsecondary education system.

Build a Consensus Around the Need to Realize the Vision

Policy leadership is about creating consensus, not finding it. It is about defining and giving voice to issues and then taking steps to ensure that others come to understand and appreciate the problem — although not necessarily the solution — in a similar way. In practical terms, this places responsibility on leadership to do the following:



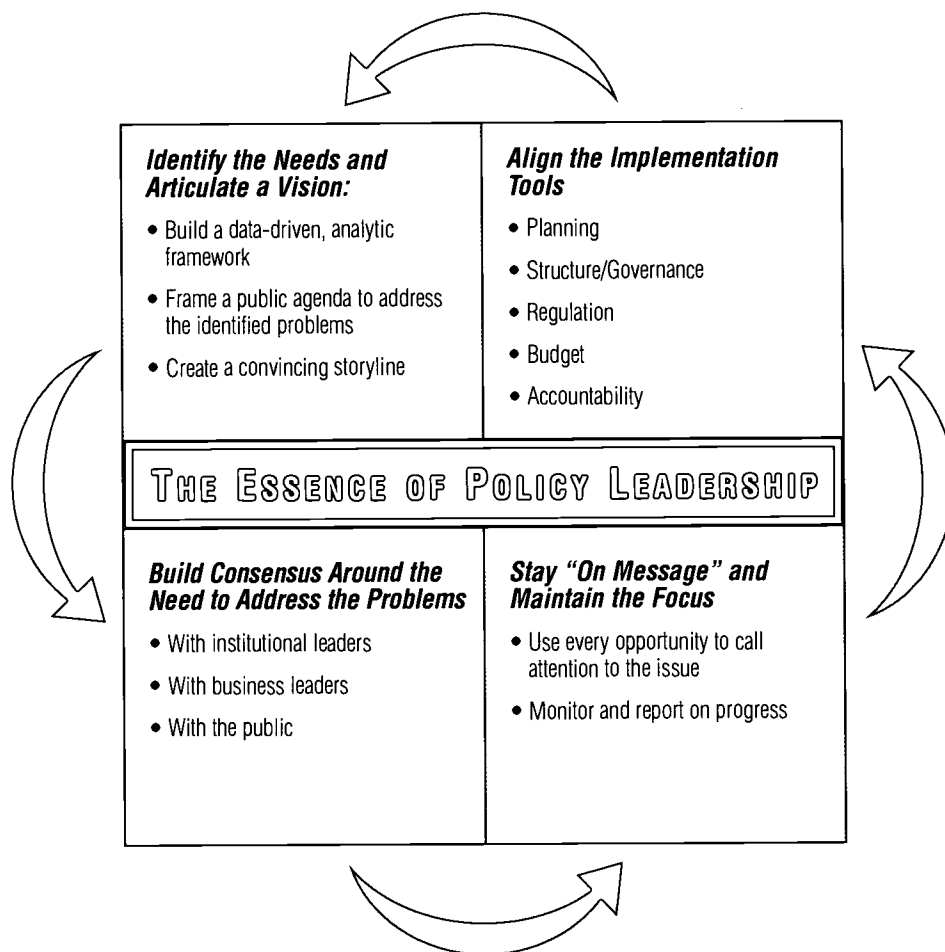
1. Look at the facts and come to a judgment about the needs that must be addressed.
2. Share that evidence with an ever-widening audience — other policymakers, opinion leaders, the media, the general public — and seek consensus around the interpretation of the evidence.

The reality is that solutions to postsecondary education policy problems are

seldom achieved in the absence of either collective understanding of the problem or widespread agreement that the problem identified is of sufficiently high priority to be addressed. Successful policy leaders deal with issues that meet both of these criteria.

Stay “On Message” and Maintain the Focus

Issues of strategic importance to a state and its citizens seldom are solved quickly.



Progress requires concerted action over extended periods of time. The responsibility of persons in positions of policy leadership is to maintain focus on the agenda, ensure progress is monitored and reported, and encourage mid-course corrections in the application of implementation tools.

Align the Implementation Tools

While problems get identified in broad terms, solutions almost invariably are achieved through numerous and consistent implementation steps. There is good reason to heed the admonition to “think globally but act locally.” Policy leaders cannot assume responsibility for solving problems, but they must help create an environment in which the people and institutions involved are encouraged to take actions that contribute to solutions. In policy leadership for postsecondary education, the obligation is to ensure that the tools available (funding, regulation, delegation of decisionmaking authority

and accountability mechanisms) are wielded in ways that are mutually reinforcing and oriented toward achieving the desired ends.

Put in these terms, the notion of policy leadership does not seem all that complicated. So why are there so few obvious applications of these ideas in the realm of postsecondary education?

Several barriers to policy leadership are outlined in the following section. These barriers must be confronted honestly and forthrightly, or they are likely to waylay and put off course the exercise of policy leadership. In the end, the essence of policy leadership is to stay the course, to sustain the momentum from needs, to vision, to consensus and to alignment of the policy tools that will support constructive change. Too often, states and competing leadership groups take up parts of the agenda, but cannot sustain the momentum.

BARRIERS TO THE EXERCISE OF POLICY LEADERSHIP

Many factors contribute to the infrequent exercise of real policy leadership on matters affecting higher education. Setting aside such factors as the personalities and interests of persons in a position to exercise leadership, two overarching barriers remain:

- The emphasis on "means" to the detriment of attention to "ends," that is, a focus on solutions without appropriate prior attention to defining the problem
- The overwhelming tendency to define problems, when they are addressed, in terms of the education enterprise

Refocusing Oregon's Vision

Building on a decade's effort in economic development and educational improvement, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber appointed a Task Force on Higher Education and the Economy to take a fresh look at what the state's people, communities and businesses need, want and get from higher education.

The task force began by identifying a number of barriers to change, including the following:

- Compartmentalized governance
- Institutional protectionism
- Weak incentives
- Obscure budgeting and funding processes
- Over-regulation that stifles responsiveness.

The task force then recommended several steps to overcome these barriers and begin to realize a new vision, including:

- Access to world-wide higher education resources
- "Open markets" with more providers and competitors
- Clearly defined education services provided through "contracts" rather than general subsidies
- More autonomy and customer-based accountability.

With strong support from the governor, the system board and others, the policies and structures needed to realize this vision are being put into place.

instead of the people served. Again, this involves focusing on the means rather than the ends.

Immersion in the Means

Policymakers function in a busy political world, a world in which losses are avoided and wins are counted when the possible — rather than the optimum or even the desirable — is achieved. In such a world, there are some real impediments to policy leadership.

One such impediment is the consideration of time. With few exceptions, issues of strategic importance to a state or institution are resolved only through persistent and consistent attention over several years. The agenda stated by one person or administration must be carried over to the next, a difficult situation in the best of circumstances. The situation is exacerbated in states with term limits for elected officials; individuals are in leadership positions for shorter periods of time and have even less patience for dealing with long-term issues.

The Orientation of State-Level Decision-making to How Things Will Be Accomplished

Questions of how money will be raised (tax policy), how resources will be distributed (the budget) and what rules apply (regulatory matters of every stripe) dominate the formal decisionmaking processes in most states. As a consequence, it is harder to deal with the issues of why things should be done. It is hard not just because it is outside the norm, but also because focusing on the ends to be accomplished brings to the fore political

differences that are difficult, or impossible, to reconcile.

As soon as problems get specified clearly enough to give direction to potential solutions, it becomes clear that some constituents will receive more attention and benefits than others — rural instead of urban, the wealthy instead of the poor, or vice versa. A key facet of successful policy leadership is the ability to identify and communicate ways in which solutions to a specific problem benefit constituents across a broad range of the political spectrum. Put bluntly, solutions that focus on society's "have-nots" must be shown to serve the "haves" in direct ways. Postsecondary policy leadership needs to be framed in terms that will benefit all or the majority of society — for example, economic growth, healthy communities and broader access and opportunity.

The Structure and Bureaucratic Processes Endemic in State Government

The real problems faced by states and their individual and corporate citizens seldom fall neatly within the purview of a single state agency. Efforts to reduce crime seldom succeed when solutions are sought solely through the courts or the corrections department, ignoring issues of education, economics, employment and other factors connected to the incidence of crime. Similarly, efforts to improve the public schools are unlikely to be successful without the wholehearted participation of higher education, social service agencies and other agencies and programs. Almost all attempts to improve the lives of people, the health of children,

Planning for New Policy in Utah

In recent years, under the leadership of Governor Michael Leavitt and the state legislature, Utah has made sizable investments in technology and telecommunications for higher education. For example, in 1998, 768 technologically delivered classes were offered, with more than 24,000 enrollments. *PC Week* recently named Utah's System of Higher Education as No. 1 on its list of the top 100 most innovative government agencies and education institutions in the use of technologies.

Building on these investments and facing growth both in the economy and in postsecondary enrollment, the Utah Board of Regents has undertaken a new master planning process. Beginning with surveys of major stakeholders and targeted discussions in communities and on campuses throughout the state, the board compiled a map of diverse needs, perspectives and expectations that underscored the challenges and opportunities Utah faces.

This examination of statewide needs resulted in the creation of four separate task forces to reexamine aspects of state and system policy: funding mechanisms, accountability and performance indicators, technology needs (both management and delivery systems), and institutional roles and system configuration. The task forces are working with an eye toward finding better ways to meet the state's rapidly changing economic and social needs.

the strength and viability of communities, and the earnings of both employers and employees require creative and concerted action by multiple elements of state government. In some cases, this means lending a helping hand, but as often as not, it means not erecting barriers.

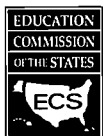
In the context of state policy, postsecondary education gets caught in this same web — viewing itself (and being viewed by others) as a competitor for funds rather than as an integral part of solutions to critical state problems. The emphasis gets placed on institutions and their status and well-being rather than on the use of this

Policy leaders must ensure that activities undertaken do not lead to circumstances in which the easy work gets done and the hard work is ignored.

major statewide asset to achieve social purposes. The increasing reliance on “markets” to provide incentives for institutional change and behaviors likely will exacerbate problems from the perspective of state needs. In response to incentives in the broader environment, institutions are likely to pursue agendas not on the list of a state’s strategic issues.

Because of this, and particularly within a market environment, states not only must sustain education capacity, but also enter

the market on behalf of their citizens’ collective needs and enlist the aid of a wide range of contributors in addressing the needs. In doing so, policy leaders must ensure that the activities undertaken do not lead to circumstances in which the easy work gets done and the hard work gets ignored. If so, the “wrong” problems may be solved, but the real issues may be obscured by things less important. This is the ultimate and most difficult demand for accountability.



THE CONTENT OF PUBLIC AGENDAS

Policy leadership as defined places the creation and furtherance of a public agenda at the core of the activity. Matters of implementation play a subsidiary role; center stage is reserved for defining the issues to be addressed — easy to say, hard to do. Success in developing consensus around a public agenda that gives direction to activities carried out by higher education institutions (and other organizations and agencies) is what separates policy leadership from organizational administration.

Oklahoma's "Brain Gain 2010"

The Oklahoma State Regents recently launched a new initiative, Brain Gain 2010, to raise postsecondary education participation and attainment levels. The initiative is designed to increase baccalaureate and associate degree completion to match the pace of competitor states through a set of related strategies, including the following:

- Strengthening admission standards to ensure students are well-prepared for college-level work
- Easing students' transition from high school to postsecondary education and into the workplace
- Increasing incentives for student academic performance and progression
- Ensuring smooth transfer and program articulation across two-year colleges, four-year universities and other providers, in line with changing student needs and enrollment patterns.

Realizing the scope of the challenges and the constraints on the state's resources, the board also has put into place a "learning site initiative." Colleges and universities will be responsible for meeting postsecondary education needs not just through their own classes and programs, but also by bringing in courses and services from other providers outside as well as inside their geographic service area. This approach will make existing institutions "delivery hubs" for a variety of services and providers, with the use of OneNet, the state's telecommunications and information network.

The public agenda of the key strategic postsecondary education issues facing a state will vary necessarily from state to state. Even if the problems facing State A are nearly identical to those facing State B, plantation of an agenda seldom works. The seeds of ideas can be borrowed, but they must be grown and nurtured in the unique soil of each state's political culture. As a consequence, similar agendas can emerge cloaked in different terms and portrayed, appropriately, to different constituencies in varying ways.

While the public agenda will necessarily differ from state to state, the overarching themes that emerge across the states tend to revolve around a limited set of common issues. These include the following:

Economic Development and Betterment

Economic issues underlie postsecondary policy initiatives in many states, although they emerge in different guises.

In some states, the emphasis is placed on raising citizens' standard of living. This agenda usually focuses on creating better jobs for an underemployed workforce. In other states, the strategic issue is diversifying the economy and the tax base, creating less dependence on one or two industries, such as agriculture or mining. Still other states emphasize having a highly educated workforce and working to ensure that the economy will evolve in such a way as to keep that workforce employed. Finally, there are states where the focus is on alleviating regional differences in economic opportunity and, in the process, reducing the incidence of economic deprivation in the poorest areas.



Even in states with stable population bases, there can be serious problems associated with demographic changes.

These are subtle but important differences that become more powerful with good data and that will frame the economic issues in ways that will bring education to the forefront. As political leaders make more speeches on the need for a world-class workforce to succeed in an increasingly competitive, global economy, education is always a big part of the solution.

Improving the Quality of Life

Under this umbrella theme are issues dealing with public safety, transportation, the environment and public health, particularly issues such as infant mortality, nutrition and the physical well-being of young children. The windfall of tobacco settlement funds has brought conversation about these topics to the forefront in some states, although the connections to postsecondary education are not yet clear. In arguing quality-of-life issues, the tendency is to create a laundry list of historically unfunded (or underfunded) programs rather than to undertake a coordinated, well-planned effort directed at a clearly articulated problem, and actively involving higher education and other sectors.

Dealing with Demographic Change

Some states face the challenge of rapid population growth and the consequences of this growth for education, the economy and quality of life. Other states are confronting the complications associated with population decreases and the different impacts on the economy, the viability of communities and the ability to sustain the delivery of basic services. Even in states

with stable population bases, there can be serious problems associated with demographic changes.

This situation is most evident in states where the population increasingly is concentrated in urban areas, creating new problems in both cities and the depopulated areas left behind. Demographic changes also involve the rapid growth of diverse population groups. In California, for example, the concern is with providing educational opportunities for "Tidal Wave II," the 450,000 additional students, mostly non-Anglo, expected to seek postsecondary education in the next decade. In several other high-growth states as well, this need to accommodate population change has dominated policy discussions, with issues of the economy and quality of life being nudged into the background.

However these overarching issues are framed, they have several features in common. First, they represent the kinds of issues political leaders have trouble ignoring. Second, although the problems seem obvious, it is usually difficult to frame them in ways that lead to consensus. For policy leaders, the real challenge is finding a way to frame the issue that is not inherently divisive. Third, these issues cannot be addressed successfully by a single state agency or policy tool; rather, they must be addressed on a broad front. Fourth, and probably most important, none of these issues is specifically about higher education or postsecondary education, yet postsecondary education has significant roles to play in addressing almost all of them.

There is considerable evidence, for example, that the more highly educated an individual, the more likely it is that he or she:

- Is economically secure
- Will contribute to his or her community
- Will attend to his or her personal well-being and have access to the health-care system
- Will provide for the needs of his or her children.

Clearly, a strong case can be made for policies and public investments designed to raise the education levels of a state's population. In many states, this requires fashioning policies designed to enhance education levels of the adult population, not just persons coming through the traditional education pipeline into adulthood. The majority of persons who will make up the workforce in 2020 already are past the traditional age for formal education. If a state has an education deficit, a major part of its solution necessarily must involve strategies focused on individuals age 25 and older. These individuals are likely to be rooted in their communities by employment, family responsibilities and other ties. They require convenient access to learning opportunities that provide an avenue to continuing improvement and personal betterment.

A hallmark of successful policy leadership will be the ability to fashion policies and a postsecondary environment that create the conditions in which education goes to the client (rather than the client always

accommodating the services). Just as crucial is the ability to connect education policy to broader state purposes — economic improvement, enhanced quality of life and other issues that usually serve as the basis for a public agenda. Making public policy on an agency-by-agency basis — and, specifically, treating higher education as an enterprise disconnected from the broader issues — gets in the way of achieving these desired ends.

With these points in mind, it is clear that those persons charged with exercising policy leadership have legitimate questions and face major challenges: What are the best ways to get started? What types of information are needed? What strategies work best? In short: What can I do about this on Monday morning?

THE PRACTICALITIES OF GETTING STARTED

Exercising policy leadership is a complicated undertaking. It necessarily varies in keeping with the particular problems and the political cultures of each of the 50 states. The obligation to put a local face on leadership means there are no "cookbook" solutions. It is more art than science, and the most effective strategies are those designed in place. At the same time, it must be recognized that policy leadership requires more than a winning style and charismatic presence. At its core, policy leadership is substantive; it revolves around defining a problem to be addressed and taking steps to ensure that actions taken over time collectively represent solutions to those problems.

Exercising Policy Leadership Through Statewide Planning

In **Illinois**, the Board of Higher Education commissioned surveys of students, employers, legislators, community leaders and other key persons to develop a clearer picture of perceptions and concerns about higher education.

These needs and expectations became the basis for a new statewide plan — "Education for the 21st Century: A Citizens' Agenda for Illinois Higher Education." Based on the new plan, the board is working with state and institutional leaders to put into place a set of ambitious initiatives to increase education access and attainment, enhance institutional quality and responsiveness, and strengthen partnerships and productivity in ways that individual institutional efforts alone never could accomplish.

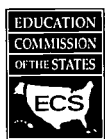
Similarly, in **Mississippi**, a new committee is working on ways to link and frame institutional planning more effectively. The Board of Trustees Planning Committee is challenging the higher education system to take a fresh look at the state's changing needs and shape a vision that will address those needs. This effort is a clear example of exercising policy leadership at the state and institutional levels to chart a new course for postsecondary education.

Because there are large substantive components to policy leadership, it is possible to suggest how to proceed. Outlined below is a set of steps that, if effectively completed, could increase the likelihood of success.

Who, however, can and should exercise policy leadership for postsecondary education? First, governors are often in the best position to develop and provide policy leadership. They can command statewide public attention, convene the requisite parties, organize the necessary resources, point to problems and possible solutions, appoint high-profile commissions and even call special legislative sessions. An increasing number of governors are exercising visible leadership around education and postsecondary education issues, either directly or through the designation and active support of leaders who can act on their behalf.

Legislative leaders and legislative bodies in general are less well-positioned to play such policy leadership roles, simply by virtue of the fact that they represent more local constituencies and speak with many voices. Yet, policy leadership for postsecondary education cannot go forward without support and consistent actions in the relevant areas of legislative decision-making, including appropriations, substantive legislation and oversight. Legislative leaders also can convene special committees and study groups, and it is extremely important that such efforts support the directions being set for policy.

Statewide higher education boards, board chairmen and state higher education executive officers also can and often do play



central roles in policy leadership. Acting on behalf of the public and through appointment by the governor, board chairmen in Illinois, Utah, Oregon, Washington and other states have set and sustained policy agendas that go well beyond the immediate needs of the institutions for which they hold governing or coordinating roles.

In a number of states, citizens' lobbies, privately funded groups or business-industry-community coalitions are starting to play policy leadership roles. The California Citizens Commission on Higher Education is one example. To be successful, however, such independent efforts must find ways to institutionalize the coalitions they assemble and the directions they advocate. Lacking this, even the most energized citizens' lobbies can quickly dissipate or fall victim to competing interests.

Diagnosing the Problem

The first step in effective policy leadership is attention to diagnosing the problem. While the solicited viewpoints of individuals with different perspectives is a useful step, it is often taken too early in the process. As the initial step, there is no substitute for gathering facts — facts that allow one to paint a picture of the state postsecondary system's strengths and weaknesses, stripped bare of the rhetoric and the rose-colored glasses often employed to put a positive spin on findings. The task is to assemble data that allow comparisons between and among states and counties or regions within a state.

Problem diagnoses also require data that provide a glimpse of the future, such as demographic and economic projections. The following data are key elements in any analyses directed at defining the problem:

Demographics — current and projected

- Numbers
- Age
- Race/ethnicity
- Education attainment

Economics

- Components of gross state product
- Employment, by industry and occupation
- Per-capita income
- Incidence of poverty

Health

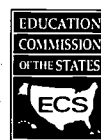
- Key indicators of health status of various subpopulations

Criminal justice

- Crime statistics
- Incarceration rates.

Education participation and success

Even a cursory examination of basic statistics will serve to identify compelling statewide issues. More careful examination can lead to real understanding of the issues — nuances, complexities and interrelationships to other issues. In Kentucky, for example, such analyses drew attention to low per-capita incomes and low educa-



Once policy leaders have a grasp of the issue, the difficult work begins — communicating the nature and scale of the problem to a broader audience.

tion attainment levels that leave large segments of the state's population incapable of participating effectively in the modern workplace. In California and New Mexico, such analyses provided insight into the ramifications of population growth; in North Dakota, just the opposite — the complications of major population redistribution within the state. Whatever the issues, the objectives of diagnosis should be the following:

- Focus on the problem, not the solutions
- Bring problems or issues into stark relief through comparisons with other states and/or contrasts across regions or population groups
- Focus on the needs of the state's citizens, individually and collectively, rather than on institutions of higher education.

Developing a "Storyline" Around the Topic

Once policy leaders have a grasp of the substance of the issue, the difficult work begins — communicating the nature and scale of the problem to a broader audience. Here there is no substitute for the skill, ability and courage of individual leaders. The task is to find a way to deliver bad news ("our state is not doing well in a key area") in a way that enlists support to address the problem from a broad array of constituents. It is impossible to overstate the value of a simple phrase or slogan that captures the vision and resonates with people. Among the slogans some states have used for their postsecondary initiatives are "Education Pays," "Learning for Life" and "Investing in Our Future."

Building a Consensus

As noted earlier, policy leadership requires the ability to build a consensus around a defined problem. Leaders must take responsibility for framing the issues and then use the consultative process to build awareness, understanding and acceptance of the issues. This requires an explicit strategy to take the message to editorial boards, executive boards of business and industry groups, labor unions, representatives of taxpayer-rights groups and others. Such outreach allows the storyline to be fine-tuned, alternative interpretations of the data to surface and acceptance of the message to be assessed. Policy leaders also can take advantage of public appearances to bring the message to a broader audience.

Fortunately, this is the area of comfort and expertise for most public leaders. In fact, the tendency often is to go too far, to promise too much too quickly. The best policy leadership results when the strategy does the following:

- Stays focused on the problems or issues and avoids proffering solutions before there is widespread acceptance that a problem exists and must be addressed.
- Is flexible enough to accommodate a better definition of the problem if someone comes forward with a persuasive reinterpretation of the data.
- Continues the effort even if a parade does not form behind the issue. This may not mean rejection of the issue but rather a collective unwillingness to address the problem at this time.

Recommending Solutions

Once an issue is firmly established on the public agenda, there is much to be said for opening the door to suggested solutions or combining actions that represent small steps in the direction of a resolution to the problem. If the issue being addressed is truly of strategic interest, it is highly unlikely that its resolution will come in a single master stroke. Progress more likely will come from persistent, consistent steps that nudge the state in the desired direction. The role of policy leadership is not to have all the answers. Rather, the assignment is to stay on message and ensure the issue gets attention over an extended period by continually asking the question: "How does this action help us get where we need to go?" When this question is anticipated at all levels up and down the line, the problem statement has become institutionalized.

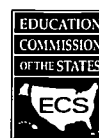
Conducting a Policy Audit

One more formal step important to implementation is conducting a policy audit. It

is important to review existing policies for postsecondary education — finance, governance, accountability, regulation — and ask the following questions:

- Which policies provide positive incentive and direction to addressing the identified problem?
- Would specific policy changes enhance their positive impact?
- Which policies or policy processes create barriers to addressing the issue?
- Can such policies be eliminated or processes changed or less negative alternatives be found?

If the task, for example, is to address adult literacy, states need to put in place policies that provide intensive education to persons receiving welfare payments or who have been incarcerated. At the same time, they should avoid or eliminate policies that establish higher tuition levels for students who access their education via distance learning, or that limit the ability of any provider to offer remedial education.



CONCLUSION

At the core, policy leadership is grounded more strongly in the art of public leadership than in the techniques of policy analysis and implementation. Leadership involves creating consensus around an agenda, not "finding" that agenda. It requires leaders to identify key problems, develop and articulate a vision for dealing effectively with those problems, and then get a substantial part of the broader society to unite around a common agenda. Policy leadership requires getting out in front of an issue — discussing a problem, getting others committed to addressing that problem and establishing the parameters of a solution.

If and when this is accomplished, leaders are well-advised to step back. It is not wise to try to provide all the answers to the problem posed; initial answers are not necessarily better than those of other persons who may have something to contribute. While leaders do not have to shoulder the full responsibility for offering policy solutions, they are obliged to do the following:

- **Invite others to contribute to a solution (or to progress) in whatever ways are appropriate.** Policy leadership needs to focus on the "big ideas" and recognize that implementing solutions requires many small steps that reinforce and complement one another. This means that an essential feature of policy leadership for postsecondary education is the ability to rally to the common cause those persons with authority.
- **Monitor progress and constantly reinforce the agenda through both word and deed.** It is critical that persons in positions of policy leadership explain their acts (and judge the acts of others) by reference to the established agenda. They must be able to say, "I am taking this step because it contributes to our public agenda in this way."
- **Find ways to institutionalize the public agenda — to keep it from passing from the scene as a result of the next election, new board appointments or new individuals joining the leadership team.** This is not to say that public agendas cannot and should not change. It is to say, however, that the issues of strategic importance to a state seldom are resolved in one four- or eight-year span of time. Continuity is important. Carrots cannot grow if they are uprooted daily to check on their development, and policies do not work if they are uprooted before they have time to take effect.

ECS hopes this report will help remove some of the mystery and abstraction from the notion of policy leadership, and contribute to its being more widely and effectively practiced. If it also fuels substantive action on important topics of postsecondary education, it will serve even more useful purposes. Little real progress or social benefit is likely to result from the unfolding transformation of postsecondary education unless the tools and approaches of policy leadership are able to set and maintain the new directions that the community, state and national needs will require.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To provide background and stimulate discussion, ECS asked leading thinkers and thoughtful leaders to provide short "briefing papers" on key issues facing postsecondary education. The assignment was to convey, as briefly and succinctly as possible, the urgency and importance of the issue and its public policy implications.

The authors and their papers include the following:

"Help Wanted: Advanced Education and the Changing Workforce,"

Anthony P. Carnevale

"Postsecondary Education's Role in Social Mobility and Social Justice,"

William G. Bowen

"The School-College Connection,"

Arthur Levine

"Changing Demands on Teacher Education and Professional Development,"

James B. Hunt and Molly Corbett Broad

"Education Uses of Information Technology: A View for State Leaders,"

Margaret A. Miller and Steven W. Gilbert

"Higher Education for the Next Century: Changing State Needs and Roles,"

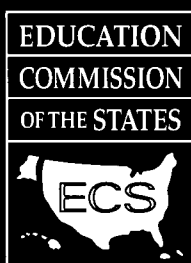
Patrick M. Callan and Gordon K. Davies

"Convergence and Competition: Transforming Postsecondary Education —An International Perspective,"

Alan Wagner

These papers are intended to stimulate broad discussion within many different settings. None of the papers represents the diversity of perspectives and interests that needs to be considered in addressing these important issues. By airing the issues, however, ECS hopes to promote more considered action.

The briefing papers are contained in a companion volume, *Transforming Postsecondary Education for the 21st Century – Briefing Papers*, available on the ECS Web site (www.ecs.org).



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